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shall not submit any additional statements unless the statements are specifically requested by GAO or submitted after permission has been granted by GAO.

[61 FR 39042, July 26, 1996, as amended at 67 FR 79835, Dec. 31, 2002]

§ 21.4 Protective orders.

(a) At the request of a party or on its own initiative, GAO may issue a protective order controlling the treatment of protected information. Such information may include proprietary, confidential, or source-selection-sensitive material, as well as other information the release of which could result in a competitive advantage to one or more firms. The protective order shall establish procedures for application for access to protected information, identification and safeguarding of that information, and submission of redacted copies of documents omitting protected information. Because a protective order serves to facilitate the pursuit of a protest by a protester through counsel, it is the responsibility of protester's counsel to request that a protective order be issued and to submit timely applications for admission under that order.

(b) If no protective order has been issued, the agency may withhold from the parties those portions of its report that would ordinarily be subject to a protective order. GAO will review in camera all information not released to the parties. Where a protective order has been issued, documents may be filed by electronic means (other than facsimile transmission) only when specifically authorized by GAO.

(c) After a protective order has been issued, counsel or consultants retained by counsel appearing on behalf of a party may apply for admission under the order by submitting an application to GAO, with copies furnished simultaneously to all parties. The application shall establish that the applicant is not involved in competitive decision-making for any firm that could gain a competitive advantage from access to the protected information and that there will be no significant risk of inadvertent disclosure of protected information. Objections to an applicant's admission shall be raised within 2 days

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after receipt of the application, although GAO may consider objections raised after that time.

(d) Any violation of the terms of a protective order may result in the imposition of such sanctions as GAO deems appropriate, including referral to appropriate bar associations or other disciplinary bodies and restricting the individual's practice before GAO.

[61 FR 39042, July 26, 1996, as amended at 67 FR 79835, Dec. 31, 2002]

§ 21.5 Protest issues not for consideration.

A protest or specific protest allegations may be dismissed any time sufficient information is obtained by GAO warranting dismissal. Where an entire protest is dismissed, no agency report need be filed; where specific protest allegations are dismissed, an agency report shall be filed on the remaining allegations. Among the protest bases that shall be dismissed are the following:

(a) *Contract administration.* The administration of an existing contract is within the discretion of the contracting agency. Disputes between a contractor and the agency are resolved pursuant to the disputes clause of the contract and the Contract Disputes Act of 1978. 41 U.S.C. 601–613.

(b) *Small Business Administration issues*—(1) *Small business size standards and standard industrial classification.* Challenges of established size standards or the size status of particular firms, and challenges of the selected standard industrial classification may be reviewed solely by the Small Business Administration. 15 U.S.C. 637(b)(6).

(2) *Small Business Certificate of Competency Program.* Referrals made to the Small Business Administration (SBA) pursuant to sec. 8(b)(7) of the Small Business Act, or the issuance of, or refusal to issue, a certificate of competency under that section will generally not be reviewed by GAO. The exceptions, which GAO will interpret narrowly out of deference to the role of the SBA in this area, are protests that show possible bad faith on the part of government officials, or that present allegations that the SBA failed to follow its own published regulations or

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failed to consider vital information bearing on the firm's responsibility due to the manner in which the information was presented to or withheld from the SBA by the procuring agency. 15 U.S.C. 637(b)(7).

(3) *Procurements under sec. 8(a) of the Small Business Act.* Under that section, since contracts are entered into with the Small Business Administration at the contracting officer's discretion and on such terms as are agreed upon by the procuring agency and the Small Business Administration, the decision to place or not to place a procurement under the 8(a) program is not subject to review absent a showing of possible bad faith on the part of government officials or that regulations may have been violated. 15 U.S.C. 637(a).

(c) *Affirmative determination of responsibility by the contracting officer.* Because the determination that a bidder or offeror is capable of performing a contract is largely committed to the contracting officer's discretion, GAO will generally not consider a protest challenging such a determination. The exceptions are protests that allege that definitive responsibility criteria in the solicitation were not met and those that identify evidence raising serious concerns that, in reaching a particular responsibility determination, the contracting officer unreasonably failed to consider available relevant information or otherwise violated statute or regulation.

(d) *Procurement integrity.* For any Federal procurement, GAO will not review an alleged violation of subsections (a), (b), (c), or (d) of sec. 27 of the Office of Federal Procurement Policy Act, 41 U.S.C. 423, as amended by sec. 4304 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1996, Public Law 104-106, 110 Stat. 186, February 10, 1996, where the protester failed to report the information it believed constituted evidence of the offense to the Federal agency responsible for the procurement within 14 days after the protester first discovered the possible violation.

(e) Protests not filed either in GAO or the contracting agency within the time limits set forth in §21.2.

(f) Protests which lack a detailed statement of the legal and factual

grounds of protest as required by §21.1(c)(4), or which fail to clearly state legally sufficient grounds of protest as required by §21.1(f).

(g) *Procurements by agencies other than Federal agencies as defined by sec. 3 of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, 40 U.S.C. 472.* Protests of procurements or proposed procurements by agencies such as the U.S. Postal Service, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, and non-appropriated fund activities are beyond GAO's bid protest jurisdiction as established in 31 U.S.C. 3551-3556.

(h) *Subcontract protests.* GAO will not consider a protest of the award or proposed award of a subcontract except where the agency awarding the prime contract has requested in writing that subcontract protests be decided pursuant to §21.13.

(i) *Suspensions and debarments.* Challenges to the suspension or debarment of contractors will not be reviewed by GAO. Such matters are for review by the contracting agency in accordance with the applicable provisions of the Federal Acquisition Regulation.

(j) *Competitive range.* GAO will not consider protests asserting that the protester's proposal should not have been included or kept in the competitive range.

(k) *Decision whether or not to file a protest on behalf of Federal employees.* GAO will not review the decision of an agency tender official to file a protest or not to file a protest in connection with a public-private competition.

[61 FR 39042, July 26, 1996, as amended at 67 FR 79835, Dec. 31, 2002; 70 FR 19681, Apr. 14, 2005]

§21.6 Withholding of award and suspension of contract performance.

Where a protest is filed with GAO, the contracting agency may be required to withhold award and to suspend contract performance. The requirements for the withholding of award and the suspension of contract performance are set forth in 31 U.S.C. 3553 (c) and (d).

§21.7 Hearings.

(a) At the request of a party or on its own initiative, GAO may conduct a hearing in connection with a protest.